



**Information provided to Housing Commission
September 13, 2006**

Update on Visitability/Universal Design Initiatives

- The Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation (DPOR) focuses attention on accessible housing issues, particularly the concept of “visitability” in single-family housing and housing for persons with special needs. DPOR’s intense involvement is two-fold:
 - The agency administers and enforces Virginia’s Fair Housing Law, which requires certain accessibility standards in multifamily housing to prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities.
 - The agency licenses professionals involved in providing housing opportunities, such as architects, real estate agents and contractors.
- In 2003, DPOR participated in the Housing Study Commission’s Visitability Work Group discussions as a representative of the regulatory program for architects. Despite the deep commitment to accessible and adaptable housing, the Board for Architects, Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, Certified Interior Designers and Landscape Architects (APELSCIDLA) was compelled to express concerns about the work group’s legislative recommendations regarding education and examination requirements. As a result of those concerns, the Commission postponed any legislation.
- In advance of any visitability-related legislative recommendations, DPOR has moved forward on numerous fronts to promote visitability and universal design concepts in all residential housing.
- In 2003, DPOR initiated an innovative partnership with the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects (VSAIA). With assistance from HUD grant monies, the collaborative effort increased awareness among architects about the value and necessity of designing accessible and adaptable housing. Partnership features include:
 - Prominent and active involvement in VSAIA trade shows and conferences, including seminars for architects with accessibility experts, booth sponsorship, and literature distribution.
 - Free regional, half-day classes conducted on accessible design and visitability issues, featuring continuing education credits for participating architects.

- A coordinated marketing campaign with print advertisements in the VSAIA trade magazine and quarterly newsletters, as well as direct mail pieces sent to the thousands of architects licensed in Virginia.
- Building on the success of the VSAIA partnership, in 2004 DPOR extended the innovative effort to include the Home Builders Association of Virginia (HBAV). The HBAV partnership encourages home builders to help clients understand how universal design alternatives can increase the value of their investment and allow them to “age in place.”
 - Participation in the HBAV annual conference and regional chapter home shows.
 - Governor’s certificates of achievement awarded to HBAV, Tidewater Builders Association and L&M Contractors of Virginia Beach for the 2005 Home-A-Rama Universal Living Home.
 - Free attendance at the VSAIA regional, half-day classes on accessible design and visitability issues.
 - A coordinated marketing campaign with print advertisements and feature articles (under byline of DPOR Director and Secretary of Commerce and Trade) in the HBAV trade magazine and newsletters, as well as direct mail pieces sent to the thousands of homebuilding contractors licensed in Virginia.
- Equally important is reaching students as they embark on a career in architecture, building or design.
 - DPOR provides instructors for professional practice courses at Virginia’s three architecture schools – Hampton University, the University of Virginia, and Virginia Tech – to assist students in learning more about accessibility, visitability and universal design.
 - With financial support from the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) and Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), DPOR established a design competition for Virginia architecture students. “The New American Front Door” competition (<http://www.arch.virginia.edu/competitions/visitability/>) challenges architecture and landscape architecture students to re-conceive the role of the front yard, porch, and door and entry sequence. A jury of practicing architects, one of whom uses a wheelchair, judged more than 20 student submissions in 2005 and awarded \$5,000 in prize monies. DRS is taking the lead for continuing the design competition into 2006.
- In 2004, DPOR lobbied the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB) to incorporate universal design into its architecture curricula requirements. Because public colleges and universities face limited resources, institutions must place priority on those mandates required for accreditation – and DPOR believes those standards should be strengthened with more explicit universal design elements and language. Unfortunately, NAAB failed to revise its accreditation conditions beyond the existing broad language referencing accessibility and visitability concerns.
- Real estate licensees (salespersons and brokers) are required to complete continuing education courses approved by the Real Estate Board at DPOR including topics in fair housing and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

- The Fair Housing Board at DPOR administers the fair housing certification program for individuals involved in selling or renting property. The voluntary certification program is open to all, including property managers and community association members, and includes education in accessibility and fair housing law.

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